

## METTERNICH AND THE EMERGING "NEO-CONSERVATIVE" TENDENCY IN HUNGARY

by

ERZSÉBET ANDICS

Quite in contradiction to his later assertion that he had no say in questions of internal policy of the Habsburg empire, the Austrian State Chancellor was from the 1830's concerning himself day by day, in detail, most intensely and operatively, with the affairs of Hungary. This is evidenced by the material of the Austrian State Archives, and by the material of the Metternich family archives in Czechoslovakia. The Metternich documents kept in the Hungarian National Archives — to which little attention has been paid so far — are of particular interest in this respect.

The 1830's represent a particular phase in Metternich's activities in Hungary: it was the period of an overtly terroristic government aiming at intimidation. The drastic measures — the persecution of baron Miklós Wesselényi, the arrestation and sentencing of Lajos Kossuth and the leaders of the liberally thinking youth — made the contemporaries recall the darkest periods of Hapsburg oppression and elicited a firm resistance in political public opinion. The outcome of the 1839/40 Diet was a complete failure of the terroristic policy initiated by Metternich. The Chancellor had to change tactics. Instead of a violent crushing of the national liberal reformist opposition — an evidently altogether hopeless idea — he had no choice but to adopt a more circumspect and cautious long-term policy of a different nature. The basic ideas of this policy were developed by the political grouping of the young Hungarian aristocrats, the so-called neo-conservatives, by count Aurél Dessewffy first of all, who advocated a "conservative reform policy".

### *Count Aurél Dessewffy's Memorandum to the Government*

The dangerous and at the same time useless nature of the power politics of the 1830's was so much evident that it elicited disapproval and dissatisfaction even among the loyalists. In summer 1835 count Aurél Dessewffy — although at that time he already was clearly tending from oppositionist quarters towards the government — wrote to his friend baron Samu Jósika:<sup>1</sup> "Mit Schmerz sehe ich die Dinge, die in Pressburg vor sich gehen. Mit der Auflösung des siebenbürgischen Landtags

und der Citation Wesselényi's hat in unserer vaterländischen Geschichte eine neue Periode begonnen, ein Abschnitt in unserer Verwaltungspolitik, den ich nicht einen illegalen nennen will, der sich aber doch auf den äussersten Grenzen zwischen Legalität und Illegalität bewegt. Allerdings hat die Opposition und namentlich Wesselényi diese beiden Schritte veranlasst und teilweise gerechtfertigt; es fragt sich aber nicht, ob sie gerecht, ob sie verdient, sondern ob sie als polit. Massregeln als Schlusssteine künftiger Folgen zweckmässig waren. Eine günstige, obschon traurige Gelegenheit, der Tod des Kaisers, hat sich dargeboten, um eine grossherzige Rolle zu spielen und Notwendigkeiten zu entgehen, die man unmöglich kann gewünscht haben; sie war vernachlässigt und dem Verlangen gegenüber von Europa als komplett unverändert zu erscheinen, hat man höchstens praktische Interessen zum Opfer gebracht. "This interesting and characteristic letter already contains the germs of Aurél Dessewffy's future policy. As a result of the failure of the terroristic methods, even part of the conservatives considered it necessary to devise new methods of government. Count Aurél Dessewffy, whom his contemporaries unanimously regarded as a man of genius, was doubtless one of the most talented and open-minded members of the young generation of Hungary's aristocracy<sup>2</sup>. In early 1839, before the Diet met, he advanced in a memorandum his views about what the government should do in Hungary<sup>3</sup>. He gave his memorandum for opinioning not only to his friends sharing his views, but submitted it also to the Vienna government; and, as concerned questions relating to Hungary, this was equivalent first of all with Metternich. Dessewffy himself wrote to Samu Jósika that the purpose of his writing was "durch Anregung gewisser Ideen Eindruck zu machen und zu bewirken, dass diese, wenn gleich vielleicht verworfen, aber keineswegs mehr übersehen werden dürfen."<sup>4</sup> There are quite a number of ideas in this writing which represented a breach with the government policy of that time and were, in given circumstances, clearly novel.

József Ferenczy, the biographer of count Aurél Dessewffy and the publisher of his collected works — this collection being far from complete — wrote about the 1839 memorandum, and about Dessewffy's relations with the Metternich government in general: "Count Aurél Dessewffy has presented to the government a memorandum in which he urged to give up the present hesitating system which has given rise to annoyance... With this memorandum Dessewffy has completely captured the attention of the statesmen and has raised so great expectations towards himself that the government party in the Lower House has appointed him their leader...<sup>5</sup> His opinion and advice has often been asked for even by the leaders of the government, and since that time they have maintained *confidential relations* with him..."<sup>6</sup>

His biographer emphasizes that Aurél Dessewffy stood near the government also through his absolutistic views. "Dessewffy did not plan any radical change in the system of government, nor in Hungary's relations to the hereditary provinces; he insisted on the monarchic form of



government whose guarantee he saw in a *unified and firm central leadership* which, headed by him, (Dessewffy aspired to chancellorship overtly) would certainly have turned in an absolutistic direction. It was therefore that he had *confidential* connections with the government, and rendered it good services as an orator and journalist. And this was what made him unpopular with his compatriots in whom the government was not able to inspire confidence even by supporting the reforms."<sup>7</sup>

Count Aurél Dessewffy's confidential relations with the government are passed over in complete silence in a work published immediately after his death and prepared for the press by "einiger seiner Freunde und Gleichgesinnte" evidently including also his younger brother, count Emil Dessewffy. For obvious political reasons, his sympathizers kept silent about these contacts. On the contrary, they found it necessary to emphasize his independence of the government. They did it also in view of the fact that in summer 1841 Dessewffy took over the editorship of a till then insignificant newspaper, "Világ", and developed it into the principal press organ of the neo-conservative line, and an extremely determined opponent of Kossuth and his Pesti Hírlap. According to this explanation: "ohne fremde Aufforderung, ohne höhere Ermächtigung — wie Manche glauben wollten — brachte er sie im Verein mit einigen Freunden an sich..."<sup>8</sup>

The starting-point of the memorandum is this: a certain degree of progress strengthens the state; thus the government acts in its own interest if it supports this. "Insofern daher die innere Kraftentwicklung und das zunehmende Gedeihen eines Teils nicht auf Unkosten des Ganzen oder der anderen Teile vor sich geht, und keine Richtung annimmt oder ahnen lässt, die auf das gemeinsame Land auflösend wirken könnte, ist jegliches inneres Entfalten durch die Staatsverwaltung nach Kräften zu begünstigen, indem jede solche partielle Prosperität dem Gesamtgewicht des Staates, in der Staatenfamilie nach Aussen hin, zu Gutem kommt... Jedenfalls erheischt es... das Staatswohl, dass die vierzehn Millionen Seelen, über welche Österreich, vermöge der Ungarischen Krone, das Szepter führt, so wie sie numerisch 2/5 der gesamten 35 Millionen ausmachen, auch in dem politischen Selbstbewusstsein und der europäischen Stellung des österreichischen Staats womöglich das nämliche spezifische Gewicht vertreten."<sup>9</sup>

That is was in the government's own best interest to bring about changes and to promote progress was a realization that was till then completely missing from Metternich's sphere of thought.

We also find in Aurél Dessewffy's memorandum the idea which was later to become the important element of what was called the neo-conservative policy, i.e. that one principal source of trouble was the fact that the counties enjoyed too wide powers. According to the memorandum, the Hungarian counties were "52 kleine Republiken". The reason is "Misdeutung der ungarischen Munizipal-Verwaltungsrechte", "Apotheose der Komitats-Allmacht". Dessewffy condemns definitely the existing "beinahe föderative Munizipal-Organisation, die sich nach und

nach aus den landständischen Formen heraus mit dem Repräsentativ-System identifiziert". He regards the large powers of the counties intolerable also because this is favourable to the opposition. "Faktisch kommt ... die Komitatsorganisation meistens den Gegnern der Regierung zu-statten; ihre Freunde und die Anhänger der Ordnung verstehen es nicht, in diesen Formen ihre Stelle zu finden ..." "Der Klerus hat eine isolierte Stellung: er zieht sich von den Komitats-Kongregationen zurück, oder ist unwirksam und ohnmächtig. Die hohe Aristokratie erscheint höchst selten ... ihre Fiskale halten es meist mit den Gegnern der Prinzipale..."

But we find in this writing of Aurél Dessewffy also another demand of the future "conservative reformist policy". It is a demand of central significance and closely connected with the former, namely that the powers and influence of the government must be increased substantially. It is characteristic of the situation in Hungary, he writes, that "zu wenig Gewalten in den Händen der Regierung, um kräftig und mit Erfolg zu herrschen und zu verwalten". Later on this idea became the cardinal theorem of the neo-conservative policy. Dessewffy points out not only the administrative (counties), but also the political reasons of the weakness of government. It is in this connexion that he comes to the most essential point of the innovations recommended by him: on the one hand, the government should determinedly interfere with the counties' affairs (should quasi take them over), and, on the other hand, should control parliament more efficiently, should keep a tight hold on it as well.

The government should exercise its right to initiate legislation, should not permit that every suggestion promoting progress originate from the opposition, enhancing its prestige and influence thereby. With a barrage of arguments he urges (on the part of the government) "ein tätiges Auftreten und einen ausgedehnten Gebrauch der königlichen Initiative". "Bleibt die Regierung auf der Defensive, so wird es ihren Gegnern immerfort möglich bleiben, die öffentliche Meinung irre zu führen, weil nur Mut und Entschlossenheit an sich zieht". He suggests to hold short Diets, and the government to present — not necessarily formally worded bills — concrete proposals essentially worked out in their principal purport.

And of what nature should the government's proposals be to force back the influence and the popularity of the opposition?

Aurél Dessewffy considers it a decisive question not to put the government "in Verdacht des Stillstands, der Untätigkeit, der Schwäche oder gar des Obscurantismus". The government should act as the initiator of reforms. At the same time he strongly cautions: these "reforms" must not lead to a substantial change in the prevailing situation, must not even stimulate to make changes. He names the *liberal* reformist endeavours of the opposition "neumodische Theorien" and explains their spreading with the "spell" (Zauber) "den schlecht verdaute französisch-englische Freiheitsbegriffe auf halbgebildete Menschen aller Klassen aus-üben".



It is a known fact that the political, legal, administrative and cultural reforms pointing in the direction of developing a bourgeois mentality — which were urged already by the Hungarian Diet of 1790/91 and whose more concrete formulation was started at that time (the so-called “operatums”) — played an important role at the county assemblies preceding the Diet convened in 1832, and at the Diet itself. In his memorandum Dessewffy appraises these reformist ideas — which were rather moderate for the most part — as too “revolutionary” and strongly advises the government not to make a start from these. He writes “In ihrer Gesamtheit genommen enthalten die systematischen Operate eine Revolution, nicht als wenn sie Vorschläge dazu machten, sondern weil sie einen Cadre bieten für alle erdenklichen Extravaganzen, auf alle wunden Punkte führen. Nichts unberührt lassen und jenen *esprit de système* im Reformieren begünstigen und herbeiführen, der notwendig zu einer vollkommeneren Umgestaltung führt, oder doch stimmt”.

This endeavour is reflected also in the concrete proposals which he enumerates as the most urgent feasible ones. The principal characteristic of his “reform programme” is this: while he makes attempts at monopolizing a number of the popular demands of the liberals, of Kossuth and his group, he formulates them in such a manner that their realization should strengthen the position of the government and of the feudal aristocracy. His proposals relating to the counties and the towns are aimed at widening the powers of an absolutistic government. He asserts that the feudal institution of entailment must be preserved intact: “Ablösungsgesetz für den Bauer, ohne Verletzung der Avitizität”. He side-steps the question of general and proportionate sharing in taxation, etc. and at the same time gives expression to the urgent demand of big landowners — increasingly engaged in the production of commodities — to obtain credit on easy terms and better conditions for marketing their product. (Establishment of a mortgage bank, credit legislation, a certain improvement of communication facilities.)

He concludes the enumeration of his very cautious, often ambiguous proposals with the remark that he sees no obstacle in the possibility “dass manche dieser Vorschläge vielleicht scheitern würden; — jene gute Wirkung für die sie bestimmt sind, würden sie hervorgebracht haben”. Indeed, what he was aiming at here first and foremost was that the government should appear in the public eye as if it actually wanted to innovate, to make changes and to improve, whereby it would become more popular.

### *Metternich's reaction*

At the Diet of 1839–40, count Aurél Dessewffy is already regarded as the leader of the conservative side<sup>10</sup>. Attention is turned to him in Vienna. That Aurél Dessewffy was in contact with Metternich till his early death in 1842, that the latter praised and supported him, is known

from the notes and memoirs of István Széchenyi and other contemporaries<sup>11</sup>.

A work published by Dessewffy's sympathizers immediately after his death mentions Metternich as one who was Dessewffy's "hoher Gönner". "... Die berufensten Autoritäten waren darin einig, dass eine solche Tatkraft nicht feiern dürfe sondern ihr Mittel und Wege zu neuen Leistungen zu bereiten seien. Die Gelegenheit hiezu gewährte ihm Fürst Metternich — dessen Menschenkenntnis ihn stets unter die aussergewöhnlichen Erscheinungen gezählt hatte. ... Mit Empfehlungen des Fürsten versehen durchreiste er Deutschland, Holland, Belgien, Grossbritannien und Frankreich."<sup>12</sup>

It admits of no doubt that Metternich not only knew Aurél Dessewffy's memorandum — dated on the first day of 1839 — about the new government policy to be followed in Hungary, but also studied it thoroughly and even identified himself with its main ideas. In this respect we may regard as decisive proof a memorandum of highly confidential nature submitted to the Secret State Conference in the matter of things to be done in Hungary. It was drawn up by Jarcke, but had been inspired by Metternich, and — what is more — contained corrections made by Metternich himself<sup>13</sup>. This highly important document, which *determined decisively Metternich's political aims in Hungary for the decade to come*, was based fundamentally on Aurél Dessewffy's proposals. It accepted Dessewffy's ideas not only in respect of strengthening the positions of the government, restricting the powers of the counties, and the means to this end, but also in that the government must take in its own hands the cause of the "reforms", of inevitable changes. It must pursue a "reformist" policy and must wrench the right of initiative from the opposition. As has been mentioned, this latter idea did not at all occur to Metternich in the past, it had been altogether alien to him till then.

At the same time, it would be an oversimplification of this question if we tried to put a sing of equality between Aurél Dessewffy's proposals and the Metternich—Jarcke memorandum. The latter was intensely branded by the State Chancellor's extremely absolutistic and doctrinarian views. In many a respect it went irrationally far beyond Dessewffy's proposals, and did so in an ultra-conservative and centralistic direction; at the same time, a recognition of the necessity of certain — even if rather moderate — reforms intended for keeping abreast of the times is less apparent with Metternich than with Dessewffy. Such a *divergence* — not of fundamental importance, to be sure — *between the views of the Hungarian conservatives and of Metternich was felt also further on*.

As concerns the agenda in Hungary, the Metternich—Jarcke memorandum represents a tactical turning-point in the State Chancellor's views. Instead of a terroristic crushing of the liberal reformist opposition — an action whose hopelessness had become altogether obvious — Metternich, starting from Dessewffy's basic ideas, now recommends to the



Secret State Conference a different, more circumspect and more cautious plan of longer range in respect of Hungary.

In this memorandum, intended for the highest instance, Metternich tried to put the conditions in Hungary in the possible darkest light by an arbitrary treatment of facts. According to him the Hungarians already declare openly: "Ungarn sei schon jetzt und müsse noch vollständiger werden: ein Regnum pro se. Dass die Krone von Ungarn auf dem Haupte eines besonderen, von der Person des Beherrschers der Österreichischen Monarchie verschiedenen Fürsten ruhen müsse..." He pictures with the same effort the spreading in Hungary of an "oberflächlicher, aber nicht minder anmassender politischer Liberalismus". Based on all this he declares that the country "sich auf einer abschüssigen Bahn bewegt, die Zunächst zur Lockerung und Auflösung aller sozialen Bande, weiter verfolgt, zur Lostrennung vom Zentrum der Monarchie führt" and concludes that in such circumstances three systems of government are conceivable in Hungary. "Das eine derselben besteht darin: entscheidende Schritte zu vermeiden, die Zeit walten zu lassen und inzwischen einzelne Bewilligungen an Geld und Rekruten durch neue Opfer an königlichen Rechten zu erkaufen. Das zweite System läuft auf den Versuch hinaus, die historische Verfassung Ungarns nötigenfalls mit Gewalt zu beseitigen, um dann ohne den Landtag und ohne die bestehenden Gesetze zu regieren. Der dritte Weg wäre das Festhalten an dem gesetzlichen Zustande, jedoch verbunden mit einer *Reform*, oder was dasselbe ist, *der Ausbildung der Verfassung und der Verwaltung in dem Sinne, wie die hereinbrechende Anarchie es gebieterisch erfordert.*"<sup>14</sup> (Italics mine. E. A.).

Metternich — making reference also at this time to the failure of the drastically centralizing government of Joseph II — took a stand for the third variant, the legal "reform" of the Hungarian constitution, and worked out in detail the means and ways to this end in his memorandum. In the first place among his concrete proposals stands the plan that the government should have a firm hold on the counties, these "52 revolutionäre Quasirepubliken" (this is almost a verbatim repetition of Aurél Dessewffy's term). But while Dessewffy, who had raised this idea, regarded government interference as necessary mainly with the election of officials, Metternich went as far as declaring that county lieutenants, county leaders, must be royal officials who are in no dependence whatsoever on the counties and are responsible only to the monarch. "Jeder Obergespan müsste sich fortan als ein von der Regierung abhängiger, seinem Herrn verpflichteter... strang verantwortlicher königlicher Diener betrachten lernen." "In den Komitaten, wo die Obergespanne dieser Verpflichtung nicht nachkommen könnten, wäre die Aufstellung von verantwortlichen und abberufbaren Administratoren mit Besoldung und Tafelgeldern anzuordnen."<sup>15</sup> And also armed force must be made available to these lieutenants or administrators.

According to Metternich's plan, the principal duty of county lieutenants and administrators appointed under such conditions is to influence the election of deputies to the Diet in a manner favourable to the govern-

ment. "Kehrt auf diese Weise Ruhe, Ordnung und Frieden wieder in den Comitaten ein, zeigt sich dort wieder die königliche Gewalt in den Obergespänen oder deren Stellvertreter, zügelt sie den Übermut einer zuchtlosen, verwirrten Opposition, ermutigt sie die treuen Untertanen und Anhänger des Königs, übt sie den ihr faktisch und gesetzlich zustehenden Einfluss auf die Wahlen zum Landtage, so reicht diese Massregel allein und für sich schon hin, den Geist des künftigen Landtages auf eine Weise zu bestimmen, die den Rechten des Königs und der gesetzlichen Ordnung im Lande nur zum Heile gereichen kann."

But Metternich, as appears from his memorandum, wanted to make substantial changes also in legislative power, i.e. in the functions and powers of the Hungarian Diet. He emphasized that the "gesetzliche Coordination des Landtags" is the most urgent and important of all "reforms" he considers necessary in Hungary.<sup>16</sup> "Kann man ... entschieden betrachten, dass es unmöglich ist, Ungarn ohne ständische Verfassung zu regieren, so liegt umgekehrt darin zugleich die unabweisliche Forderung, eben diese Verfassung so zu ordnen, dass eine regelmässige Regierung Ungarns möglich werde."

Indeed, the feudal constitution was nearing its end, a modern transformation of Hungary's fundamental laws had become an urgent necessity. But while the opposition wanted to bring about reforms in the direction of liberal constitutionalism, bourgeois parliamentarism, Metternich found even the liberties guaranteed by the feudal constitution too much. He considered the "reformation" of the Hungarian constitution necessary in the sense that the Diet should not ensure the *joint* legislative right of the estates and the king, but should in fact serve the full assertion of the "royal will", i.e. the will of the absolutistic government in Vienna. This is discussed in concrete detail in the Metternich-Jarcke memorandum.

The memorandum suggests that the number and the right to vote of the deputies to the Diet should be revised in the sense that the influence exerted on the Diet by the clergy, the aristocracy, and by aristocratically governed towns directly subjected to the Vienna government, should increase.

As a restriction on the feudal system of representation, the memorandum demands statutory prohibition of the regional assemblies held regularly since 1791 and assuming an ever increasing role. It is intolerable that at these assemblies "wird ... wenn auch nicht der Form, so doch der Sache nach eigentlich jede Frage entschieden und dies zwar ohne dass der Presonal (speaker of the Lower House) präsierte, ohne dass er die Polizei in der Sitzung handhabte, ohne dass die Gegenwart der königlichen Tafel dem Überfluten des revolutionären Geistes den geringsten Zwang auferlegte."

The counties must be divested of their right to give obligatory instructions to the elected deputies and to recall them from the Diet at their discretion. "Wird das Votum der Deputierten schlechthin durch die Generalkongregationen (county general assemblies) diktiert, so ist der



Sitz der Gesetzgebung nicht mehr am Landtage, sondern in den 52 Comitaten, die Verhandlung mit dem Landtage aber fruchtlos, ja unmöglich." Deputies once elected should remain, members of the Diet, independent of the will of the voters, ten years at least. So they will at least not try "sich durch masslose Übertreibungen die Zufriedenheit der revolutionären Zeitungen und durch diese wieder Popularität bei ihren Committenten zu sichern."

The actually existing immunity of the deputies must be abolished. What is necessary is "Handhabung der sehr ausgedehnten gesetzlichen Disziplinargewalt des Personals und der Tabula Regia in ihrem ganzen Umfange in Betreff aller in ihrer Gegenwart vorkommenden verbrecherischen Äusserungen und Handlungen." The memorandum considers it a dangerous abuse that the police is not present at the meetings of the estates, and holds the attitude of the law-students intolerable, saying that similar symptoms were seen only in the revolutionary French convent. The monarch should have the right to dissolve the Diet at any time. "Die für den König obwaltende Unmöglichkeit, den Landtag wider dem Willen der Magnaten und der Stände zu schliessen..." must be discontinued.

In the foregoing we only have discussed the most important proposals of the Metternich-Jarcke memorandum supposing that these suffice for concluding that the aim the Austrian State Chancellor had set himself was to change Hungarian feudal constitutionalism gradually, seemingly legally, but at the same time radically, in an absolutistic direction. And all this under the pretext of a modernization of the constitution, including demands that showed in the direction of the working methods of bourgeois parliaments, such as the abolition of the extremely wide powers of the counties e.g. the discretionary recalling of deputies, or to prohibit the public on the gallery from influencing the talks through loud expressions of opinion, etc. In the circumstances prevailing in Hungary at that time, it was not the power of the responsible, i.e. absolutistic government that would have been increased. What was involved here essentially was the creation of a certain *Hungarian variant* of absolutistic government, a variant that would retain the outer forms of the feudal constitution, but only as a decor. While referring to modern, chiefly British examples abroad, Metternich wanted in fact to bring Hungary nearer to the government pattern of the hereditary provinces, or, to use a modern term, to "gleichschalten" Hungary with them gradually.

The memorandum stated expressly that the State Chancellor did not for a moment give up this plan he had cherished for several decades, and that he never renounced his view not to shrink back even from employing force of arms should it not be possible to accomplish all this in peaceful ways. Namely the memorandum asserts: "Die bereits geltenden Gesetze stehen hier der Krone ebensowohl zu Gebote, wie die nötige militärische Macht, wenn sie was nicht zu erwarten ist, auf Empörung stiesse... Geschähe aber auch das Unwahrscheinliche, lehnte der Landtag alle diese im Interesse des Landes gemachten Anträge ab... wäre es dann

nicht das bei weitem geringere Übel, die Krise selbst herbeizuführen und sie heute, im tiefen Frieden, wohlgerüstet zu empfangen, statt den Feinden der Ordnung und des Königtums die Wahl der Zeit und des Ortes für einen Kampf zu überlassen, dem auf die Dauer doch keine menschliche Weisheit ausweichen könnte?"

In order to calm down the members of the Secret State Conference who might possibly have recoiled from the *provocation* of such an open clash, from its consequences, Metternich adds as the concluding sentence of his memorandum: "Die öffentliche Meinung der überwiegenden Mehrheit aller gebildeten Menschen in Europa würde bei dieser Entscheidung nicht gegen Österreich Partei nehmen."

An armed coup d'état for changing Hungary's constitutional status, for liquidating Hungary's "privileges" enjoyed within the Hapsburg empire: this was Metternich's long-cherished idea. But this idea was by no means originating from Aurél Dessewffy, in this extreme form it was, by all appearances, alien to him.

The latter's conception — despite its profound conservatism, even reactionism — was not void of realistic features. The plan that the big landowner aristocracy, and the government — forming actually a community of interests — should join forces, could carry out the inevitable reforms from *above*; that whatever possible should be saved of the old institutions, taking great care that the inevitably necessary changes should leave intact in its foundations the class rule of the big landowners, and the power of the dynasty based on this rule to no small extent — this idea was not void of realities. This way was historically possible, particularly under the power and class conditions that prevailed in Hungary as a consequence of the traditional, now weaker, now stronger alliance that had existed for centuries between the majority of the Hungarian aristocracy and Hapsburg power.<sup>17</sup>

A sense for historical realities is much less apparent in Metternich's draft plan. His detachment from reality, notably from the actually prevailing power relations in Hungary, is evident also from his idea that if his proposals were accepted by the State Conference, their adoption could be pushed through already at the next Hungarian Diet, and that it would be possible to divest in one or two years the Hungarian constitution, the fundamental laws and legal customs of the Hungarian state, of their original character. The Metternich-Jarcke memorandum says this: "Der nächste Landtag dürfte daher hauptsächlich nur zu diesem Zwecke zusammengerufen werden, wobei aber zugleich die ausdrückliche Erklärung gegeben werden müsste, dass nach erfolgter Koordination gleich im nächsten Jahre ein neuer Landtag zusammenberufen werden solle."<sup>18</sup> It appears, then, that Metternich was convinced that to shift the Hungarian feudal constitution from its axis would go like clockwork. As if he had not at all been aware of the fact that Hungary's now active, now passive, sometimes peaceful, sometimes armed resistance to such attempts of Vienna had traditions of many hundred years by that time.



An ignorance of the actual historical situation, of the forces of the Hungarian society, and their altogether wrong appraisal, are evidenced by Metternich's phrases such as for carrying out his plan it will be enough to have "klare Einsicht", "fester Wille", "unerschütterlicher Mut" — and the daring enterprise will be crowned by success. Subsequent historical developments have shown that to subjugate Hungary to the yoke of despotism was possible only after crushing with ruthless violence the tremendous revolutionary efforts of 1848–49, and even so — measured in historical terms — for a short time only. The neo-absolutistic experiment following the defeat of the revolution was doomed to failure because of the internal resistance offered by the Hungarian society, and because of the forces of European development.

Last but not least, it was a mistake on the part of Metternich to believe that if his project revealing the criteria of an absolutistic and feudal reactionism would bear the "parliamentary reform" label, and would demand these reactionary changes by making reference to the British and French parliamentary systems, he would succeed in misleading public opinion. That he would succeed in concealing his greatest worry and his actual aim, i.e. to stay the progress of Hungarian feudal constitutionalism towards a modern, bourgeois-liberal parliamentarism at a time when more and more elements of this trend were perceptible. (The important role of what was essentially the "unicameral" regional assemblies, the enforcement of the majority system in the national Diet and the county assemblies, the endeavour to extend political rights to professional persons of non-noble birth, etc., etc.). In fact, Metternich regarded even the atavistic Hungarian feudal constitution as dangerous, let alone its gradual modernization, and with his doctrinarian, in several respects phantastic, project he tried to prevent from the outset what was maturing increasingly in Hungary's political life, i.e. the demand for a *responsible majority government*.

The Metternich–Järcke memorandum was top secret document; it was hardly known even to the Palatine — he was not fully trusted in Vienna. It seems highly probable that the Austrian State Chancellor did not initiate even the Hungarian neo-conservatives into the secret of his *ultimate aims* concerning Hungary; his utterly absolutistic and essentially centralistic ideas would hardly have met with unconditional approval on their part. Metternich considered it even less necessary to reveal to his Hungarian aristocratic followers — who expected considerable financial advantages from the government — his fundamental conviction that to create "civilized" conditions in Hungary is only possible by a large-scale economic and political consolidation of the "German element".

The effect on the general public would have been down-rightly inciting if people had come to know about Metternich's anticonstitutional plans e.g. that the deputies to the Hungarian Diet should be elected for 10–15 years in the future and should be altogether independent of their constituents during this extremely long term; that the right to vote in

the Diet should be changed to the effect that the unquestionable followers of the government, the high clergy and the high dignitaries of the land should have more votes and a greater influence than before; that the regional assemblies should be abolished, that the upper House should be of the same rank as the lower House; that the monarch should have the right to dissolve the Diet at his discretion, that the subordination of towns to the government should be stricter; that all questions of major importance relating to Hungary should be put before the State Conference, etc., etc. The liberal opposition more or less suspected all this; in their writings the leaders of the reform movement pointed out repeatedly that the Metternichian government policy tries to push the country towards absolutism and intends to make the country's colonial dependence still graver.

Although Metternich was not able to realize his plans mentioned above, he never lost sight of them during the entire next phase of his activities as a statesman. His instructions concerning Hungary, his advice given to the Palatine, the royal commands contained in royal rescripts, find their ultimate interpretation in this secret draft plan made in 1841: this was *Metternich's political platform*, the *general plan* for the settlement of the Hungarian question in the decade immediately preceding the revolution. A specially interesting feature of the document is that it reveals the real intentions of the Austrian State Chancellor with a candour to be found only exceptionally in other confidential state documents available from this era.

*Dissenting views in historical literature concerning the genesis of the "neo-conservative" tendency*

Based on what has been said so far, we believe that the question of Metternich's role in framing the "conservative reformist" policy of the 1840's may be regarded as substantially decided: *he was not the initiating, but the accepting party in this respect.*<sup>19</sup>

His much more rigid mentality, little susceptible to new social phenomena, was all the less suitable for initiating and framing this more elastic policy because a creative vein was not a characteristic trait of his personality. It is not by chance that this highly complex policy of "conservative reforms" was employed only in Hungary within the Hapsburg empire. Metternich was inspired in this direction by the extremely ambitious and resolute young Hungarian conservative aristocrats with quite a number of highly talented men among them; and these were not always satisfied with the aged State Chancellor's susceptibility to novel political needs.<sup>20</sup>

As concerns the dispute surrounding this question, Mihály Horváth and other contemporaries having first-hand knowledge of the events, usually were of the opinion that the cardinal elements of the conservative reformist policy originated from count Aurél Desseffy; they are already contained in his memorandum written in the first days of 1839. This



view is held in the most extreme manner by A. Springer, who otherwise knew and appraised the Hungarian conditions of that time excellently. "Was Fürst Metternich über die Sache sprach und schrieb, war der Abklatsch der Meinungen, welche in den jüngeren konservativen Kreisen galten. Eigenes konnte er, sollte er auch nicht bieten. Man verlangte von ihm keinen Rat, sondern wünschte nur sein glänzendes Ansehen für fremde Gedanken geliehen zu bekommen, um alle Hindernisse ihrer Verwirklichung, namentlich auch die Sprödigkeit des Palatinus leichter zu besiegen."<sup>21</sup> He says that Metternich's writing submitted to the highest government quarters at the end of 1844, "Aphoristische Bemerkungen über die ungarischen Zustände" was in its basic ideas the work of the Hungarian neo-conservative leaders, and that "die sententiöse Form allein die Mitwirkung Metternichs verriet."<sup>22</sup>

Of the more recent authors we must mention Gyula Miskolczy, who in every respect takes the Austrian imperial attitude as his starting point, but, although identifying himself with the opinion that in the 40's Metternich was "reformfreudig geworden", adds that "und hat vielleicht selbst nicht gefühlt, dass er in dieser Position geschoben wurde, geschoben von den jungen ungarischen Conservativen."<sup>23</sup>

Other authors hold no less clear-cut views to the contrary. The sharpest formulation is to be found in the comprehensive Metternich monograph of H. Srbik in such a categorical form as is not at all justified by the author's rather outlined familiarity with the Hungarian aspects of the Metternichian oeuvre, and can be explained mainly with his basically apologetical attitude.<sup>24</sup>

But we must as well appraise as mistaken the derivation of the neo-conservative ideas and practical proposals from Lajos Wirkner; this view is held by H. Schlitter, among others.<sup>25</sup> Wirkner was an influential and successful conveyor of the endeavours of the Hungarian neo-conservatives to Metternich. The circumstance that certain authors regard Wirkner as the initiator, quasi the father, of the conservative reform policy is based on Wirkner's memoirs: in these he tries to *pass himself off* as playing this role.<sup>26</sup> But this is simply impossible in view of the fact that Wirkner's memoranda in this question intended for Metternich — containing a number of detailed, concrete proposals — were written in December 1843 and January 1844 respectively,<sup>28</sup> i.e. at a time when the taking shape of the neo-conservative ideas and their adoption on the part of Metternich was a more or less accomplished fact. The assertion of Wirkner that his memoirs gave Metternich, "seinem Gönner", the first impulse to concern himself more intensely with the Hungarian questions is just as unfounded.<sup>28</sup> We do not call in doubt that Wirkner, who was Metternich's trusted man and one of his chief advisers in Hungarian affairs, may have played an important role if not in the initiation but certainly in the acceptance of the neo-conservative policy. Knowing Metternich's great confidence in his trusted men, it is conceivable that Wirkner's advice had a particular influence on him that he considered it carefully.

*The social background of the neo-conservative trend*

Although a considerable proportion of the so-called conservative reform proposals enumerated by Aurél Dessewffy had only the appearance of progress and were largely intended for misleading public opinion, we must attribute at all the more positive significance to the section of his memorandum in which he explains that by means of a suitable government policy the conservative elements of the Hungarian society must be activated, and that an alliance — more active than ever before — between the Hungarian big landowners and the Vienna government must be created for protecting the feudal and absolutistic institutions.

The starting-point, the social source of the policy initiated by Aurél Dessewffy and named "neo-conservative" later on, was the realization by the Hungarian big landowner aristocracy that unaided they would not be able to resist successfully the increasing antifeudal aspirations, that they inevitably need the support of the absolutist Vienna government and, what is more, the joining of forces with this government, consigning possible differences of the past to oblivion. Dessewffy writes in his above-mentioned memorandum: "Die Epochen der Politik ändern sich; es gab eine Zeit, wo auch die Politik der ungarischen Stände eine defensive sein musste... Heute aber erfordert das Interesse Ungarns: sich mit der Regierung fest zu einigen. Dass eine analoge Änderung in der Regierungs-Politik gegen Ungarn durch die Staatsklugheit geboten ist, darüber wird wohl kein Zweifel sein können. Die Regierung möge dieser Nation als einem Ganzen nicht misstrauen..."

He also points out whom the Vienna government may rely upon as loyal elements in Hungary. "Wenn auch zu spät und nur ängstlich, so hat sich doch nach und nach in einigen der Comitате seit dem letzten Landtag<sup>29</sup> auch eine conservative Partei organisiert, oder wenigstens blicken lassen. In einigen Comitaten hat sie die Oberhand gewonnen, in anderen hat sie zu grösserer Mässigung vermocht. Ausser wenigen Überresten der einstigen altungarischen Opposition, — dann der wirklich Gutgesinnten. Einsichtsvollen und einigen Ehrgeizigen, stützt sie sich auf einen Teil von Grundherren, die durch einige Verfügungen des Urbariums — die sie als Eigentumsverletzung betrachten — stutzig geworden sind<sup>30</sup> und die eigentlichen Resultate des platten Liberalismus einzusehen anfangen." This is an accurate definition of the composition of the conservative camp, and reveals clearly the class background, the social roots of the emerging new tendency.

An interesting document of the ripening united front of absolutistic and feudal forces, of an increasing convergence of the ways of the Vienna government and the Hungarian big landowner aristocracy, is a most confidential, and therefore very frank letter of the Palatine József written to Metternich in January 1842 "über die inneren Verhältnisse Ungarns."<sup>31</sup> This letter is in the Palatine's handwriting throughout, and was sent to Vienna for the sake of greater secrecy not with a courier, but with the Palatine's son, the archduke István. It throws sharp light on the shifts



and new episodes that appeared most powerfully in Hungary's social and political life in the early 40's.

Also the Palatine suggested to Metternich a novel political approach.<sup>32</sup> The contents of this letter show beyond doubt that the Palatine's attention was caught by the initiatives of Aurél Dessewffy and his circle, by the line of the newspaper "Világ", and that he was not left unaffected by all this. Apart from attaching paramount importance to the dynasty's interests, the conclusions of his letter are characterized by a certain attempt and endeavour to consider the emerging questions from a "supra-party" aspect, which actually meant nothing more than that he tried to rise above the personal and local prejudices of Dessewffy and his group and to look at things from a higher governmental point of view.

It should be noted that — in contrast to wide-spread legends about him — Palatine József's attitude in general showed no substantial departure from the fundamental political line of the Vienna government and Metternich, as is evidenced also by this document. The Palatine was not "pro-Hungarian" as certain over-loyal historians asserted him to be. In any case, he was free from Metternich's reactionary romanticism and illusions, he was much more of a realist. On the one hand, because he had first-hand knowledge of the Hungarian conditions in their concreteness and complexity; on the other hand, because his position — he was the liaison man, the mediator between the monarch and Hungary — forced him to be elastic, circumspect and cautious. His role was not an easy one. Hence his disposition to balance, hence the "finesse" in his political attitude, which István Széchenyi — perhaps the Hungarian politician who stood closest to him — mentioned several times in his confidential notes.

Palatine József called Metternich's attention first of all to the fact that the situation in Hungary had changed substantially for a number of reasons, had become more complex and dangerous: the thought of the necessity for thorough reforms is the increasing concern of the public, is practically a matter of excitement in public opinion. This he explains partly with the freer tone of the Hungarian press which keeps political questions constantly on the agenda (here he obviously has in mind the *Pesti Hírlap* edited by Kossuth since 1841), partly with external causes: these are "in ganz Europa sichtbare Aufregetheit der Gemüther und Neigung zu Neuerungen."

The Palatine points out not only the signs of radicalization in Hungary's political life; he indicates that there is a *two-directional* tendency in political developments, in the trends of public feeling "So sehr die hier geschilderte Entwicklung der Ereignisse und die dadurch herbeigeführten Folgen ... alle Aufmerksamkeit fordern, damit die Sache wieder in das gesetzliche Geleise geleitet und dadurch weitere übergriffe vermieden werden ... so haben auch anderseits diese Ereignisse in den letzten Monaten einige gute Früchte getragen. Unter diese rechne ich vor allem die, welche durch die Bekanntwerdung der nahen Absichten der Ultra-Liberalen und durch die von ihnen gemachten Angriffe auf Rechte, Be-

sitz und Eigentum hervorgebrachte Erweckung der Wohldenkenenden, jener, welche Rechte oder Eigentum besitzen, zum Schutz der Letzteren und Vereinigung derselben zur Beförderung dieses Zweckes."

With his excellent sense for reality he is aware of the fact that the big landowner conservative aristocracy is getting active and starts a counter-offensive against reformist endeavours. "... Eine Annäherung zu der Regierung von Manchem gesucht wird, welcher früher stets gegen sie als Opponent ... auftrat ... In den Reihen der Opposition, besonders jener, welche die jüngeren Magnaten bilden, Zwietracht ausgebrochen, wodurch sie wesentlich geschwächt wurde..." (As is known, Aurél Dessewffy himself had gone over from the opposition to the government side.)

The Palatine was well familiar with the situation and appraised the causative factors correctly. This appears from his remark — which returns also in his other writings — that the reformist endeavours are opposed, and approaches to the government are made, first of all by those who "welche Rechte oder Eigentum besitzen, zum Schutz der Letzteren"; loyalty to the government, the willingness to enter an alliance with the government, is characteristic of those who — to quote the Palatine's words — "ein bedeutendes Eigentum besitzen."

Yet the Palatine does not content himself with indicating that "es zeigen sich schon hin und wieder Spuren einer wohltätigen Reaktion", but deems it necessary to emphasize that the government must not play the role of a passive spectator of this process. "... Vielmehr ist es notwendig, diese im Entstehen begriffene Hinneigen zur Bildung einer Mehrheit für die Grundsätze der Ordnung und der Gesetzlichkeit zu unterstützen...". In the given situation also the Palatine considers it highly important for the government to go into action in order to obtain for itself a *majority* in Hungary in accordance with the novel political requirements. He emphasizes the importance of the historic moment when he warns Metternich: "es gibt Momente, welche nicht wiederkehren und die man unbestraft nicht vorübergehen lassen kann; und für einen solchen halte ich den gegenwärtigen, in welchem durch Fehler von einzelnen Menschen und von Behörden, der Regierung die Gelegenheit an die Hand gegeben wird, wohlthätig und mit Bestimmung der Mehrzahl der Landesbewohner auf das Land einzuwirken; ich halte es daher für notwendig, dass er vorsichtig, aber auch kräftig benützt werde." The government should act as the resolute protector of public order and piece and, by making public its determination to this effect, should encourage the conservative elements of society. This he considers to be extremely important because "die ausgesprochene Willensmeinung der Regierung zugleich den gutgesinnten Teil der Stände aufmuntern würde, durch tätigere Teilnahme an den öffentlichen Verhandlungen die Absichten der Regierung zu befördern und der Oppositionspartei das Gegengewicht zu halten".



The relationship of the Metternichian government and the Hungarian big landowner aristocracy in the 40's is increasingly characterized by an identity of fundamental interests, by the coincidence of endeavours, both in the political and economic sphere.

Politically, the Hungarian big landowner aristocracy is in ever increasing need for a close alliance with Hapsburg power to oppose the strengthening antifeudal social aspirations, the rapidly growing liberal and national reform movements. And this is the ground on which the *neo-conservatives*, organizing in the early forties as a most agile group, reacting most sensitively to the requirements of a new era, were increasingly assuming the position of imperial unity, and concluded that to increase the influence of the absolutist government is a matter of necessity. They insist on changes in constitutional and economic conditions. They become adherents of greater centralization, of a firm government power to oppose the antifeudal reform movement. In the economic field they demand a system of cheap credits, better communication facilities etc. for making production more intensive, and expect all this from the Vienna government first of all.

Both the Metternichian government and the Hungarian big landowner aristocracy dreaded a more consistent realization of revolutionary endeavours, even of liberal reforms, coming from below. None of them had a stake in the radical liquidation of feudalism, in the birth of a progressive bourgeois Hungary. Vienna had not, because the aspirations for an independent national economy of a bourgeois Hungary would have crossed Vienna's fundamental political and economic aims. It was realized in Vienna, too, that with bourgeois progress, with the emergence of a considerable Hungarian middle-class stratum, both the liberal and national aspirations would inevitably gather strength.

But a bourgeois Hungary, where the political and economic hegemony of the class of big landowners would have been crushed, was no desirable prospect for the Hungarian aristocracy either. At the same time the latter got increasingly aware that the *unchanged* preservation of the status quo, the feudal conditions, is impossible. They had to take into account that to preserve, or to salvage for the time of a bourgeois society, their political and economic power and influence is possible only if the inevitable reforms demanded by the times are realized from *above* by the aristocrats themselves in alliance with government power, and in the direction and to the extent as agrees with their class interests. The awareness that "things cannot go on like this" increasingly pervaded not only the lower, but also the upper strata of society; prevailing conditions were felt to become intolerable both "below" and "above".

The fact that in the forties Metternich, influenced by the Hungarian neo-conservatives, was willing to voice the necessity of certain changes, innovations, of "reforms" pointing backwards rather than ahead, and, moreover, his attempts in this respect, was a tough nut for his biographers to crack. Some of them see an insolvable contradiction between Metternich's attitude urging novel political methods and his usually rigid and

unyielding insistence on existing conditions. There are biographers who call in doubt on this basis that Metternich actually should have been the stubborn representative of stagnation which he was taken for at his time, and usually also during more than a century passed since. Indeed, what prompted the Austrian State Chancellor, abhorring any innovation and change, to resort to novel, we might as well say, modern means, to *experiment* with them, in contradiction to his fundamental frame of mind?

It was the objective situation first of all.

In the early forties the political, administrative and legal conditions prevailing in the Hapsburg empire came into increasing conflict with the economic forces undergoing a rapid capitalistic development and with strengthening civic aspirations. The contradiction between the political system of feudal absolutism and the capitalistic development of the economic basis grew. The working of the absolutistic government agencies, the valid legal system, administrative bodies and methods, lost accord with the requirements of real life to such an extent, became so badly irrational and untimely, that their untenableness was increasingly realized even in the highest government circles. They were overcome by the feeling that bankruptcy, downfall, revolutionary explosions are inevitable, and this feeling turned into a source of a profound pessimism, uncertainty and contradictions among them. One may recall the wranglings between these groups and factions, between Metternich, Kolowrat, Kübeck, Wessenberg and their followers, between the members of the reigning family, the proliferation of court intrigues, the ripening of the palace revolution. All this gave expression to precariousness and helplessness, often to the gloomiest despair, and was at the same time a search for false, mistaken solutions, for wonder-working remedies. "Der Zustand, in dem Österreich sich damals befand, erregte bei den Zeitgenossen Vergleiche mit jenem Frankreichs von 1789. . ." writes Wertheimer. "Weder der Staatsrat, noch die Staatskonferenz, weder eine Vorkonferenz, noch der Familienrat vermochten mehr zu retten, was infolge innerer Fäulnis dem Verderben verfallen war."<sup>33</sup>

Pessimism and a feeling of uncertainty was practically general in the highest government circles.<sup>34</sup> Even these realized that to make certain changes, innovations, "reforms" was inevitable, because the crisis in existing conditions became increasingly obvious.<sup>35</sup> These circumstances contributed to no small measure to the fact that Metternich, the stubborn representative of the status quo, was willing to adopt a well-developed, comprehensive "reform plan", true, exactly for the *purpose of maintaining the status quo*, for the preservation of the most substantial elements of the spirit of the times.

It is certainly not by chance that this political manipulation under the slogan "conservative reforms" was started in a part of the empire where the status quo had become the most unstable, and where — we may add — a social stratum of great influence had put this as a platform on its banner and organized politically for this purpose: *in Hungary*.



*The "neo-conservatives" show their colours*

Already in the first issue of the daily Világ, whose editorship was taken over in summer 1841 by Dessewffy, the propagation of the neo-conservative ideas was started with full élan. A leader in August 1841, introducing the new editor, deploys the full arsenal of the neo-conservative policy. Accordingly, the allegation that the conservative camp is not for progress is an "undeserved slander". It is a mistake to think that "all progress comes from liberalism". The most important task of Világ is to refute this "belief", this "harmful prejudice".<sup>36</sup> Already in the first issues, Aurél Dessewffy's daily declares war on the "bastardly enlightenment" of the times, on "liberalism" which "swept over the intelligentsia of entire Europe like a cholera epidemic".<sup>37</sup> "... the ideas of patriotism and progress are independent of the ideas of liberalism..."<sup>38</sup>

Aurél Dessewffy and the young conservative aristocrats, rallying round him devised tactics — ingeniously misleading in many a respect — for the defence of feudal privileges and property which were imminently menaced by the progress of the Hungarian reform movement. In order to cut the ground from under the feet of the bourgeois reformist endeavours, to disrupt the unity of the movement, to stop the reforms half-way or to turn them on a wrong track, they declared themselves to be "progressive-minded", but in a "considerate", "rational" way. Monopolizing the slongs and methods of the oppositionist movement, they tried to defeat with its own weapons, and to promote by means of the press and propaganda the creation of a *conservative majority of the government party* in the counties and in the Diet.

Although in his daily Aurél Dessewffy protested in most vigorous terms against the accusation of being the "spokesman of the feudal opposition", "the hero of feudalism or a man of stagnation", and kept proclaiming that the conservatives differ from the liberal reform party only in that they place the questions "on the difficult table of consideration",<sup>39</sup> the true aim of the entire neo-conservative movement was the organization of feudal resistance, the lining up of the "inert" class of big landowners to thwart the anti-feudal and anti-absolutistic aspirations. Világ proclaimed the "inviolability of landed property", demanded to "preserve the aristocratic body in its vigorous intactness", considered its task to protect socage as a "beneficial law", and "villein services" as "indispensable". The newspaper opposed the declaration of compulsory manumission compensation, extension of political rights to persons of non-noble birth, abolition of the manorial courts, general sharing in taxation, the construction of railways, protected the absolutistic endeavours of the government, censorship of the press, the great influence of the Catholic Church, etc., etc.<sup>40</sup>

Aurél Dessewffy and his friends emphasized from the outset that a close collaboration with the imperial government is a fundamental objective, just as "a close unity with the government" was presented as one central task in the memorandum of January 1839.<sup>41</sup> Dessewffy

and his group did not cease to popularize this idea in the columns of Világ. They praised "the firm, law-abiding government", saying that "... in addition to the really paternal grace and conscientiousness of our crowned King, our government's adhering to legal ways has set at rest all patriotic hearts."<sup>42</sup> As opposed to the "immature advice of liberal utopians" they demanded the "nation's alliance with its government."<sup>43</sup> Again in full harmony with the 1839 memorandum, they scourged also in the press the "county autocracy", the "county people carried away by the intoxication of liberalism."<sup>44</sup> Not long before his death, Aurél Dessewffy summed up his activities in public life, saying that their aim was "à consolider dans ce pays un gouvernement vigoureux..."<sup>45</sup> And what he meant by the latter was no more and no less than absolutist government power.<sup>46</sup>

The "conservative reform endeavours" of Dessewffy's circle — to quote their term — basically coincided from the outset with the Hungarian plans of the Vienna government, in fact of Metternich, and at the same time diametrically crossed the aspirations of the national reform movement in most questions. These features of the policy of the neo-conservatives assumed still sharper contours later on, and in both directions.

\* \* \*

Thus in the forties of the last century, the Hungarian liberal reform movement encountered a politically extremely agile, highly influential and determined representation of the feudal and absolutist interests. Both sides realized that the outcome of this struggle would determine the course of the development of Hungary, and of the monarchy in general, for an entire era to come. What was involved here was not less than the question of how, in what ways and forms, and, chiefly, how consistently the inevitable bourgeois development would take its course. Whether it would succeed in its victorious course to extirpate radically even the last vestiges of feudal shackles and colonial dependence, or these would be incorporated to a smaller or greater degree in the new order. Whether they — though modified — will remain basically virulent and doom Hungary, the country's population, to the adverse destiny of backward countries and peoples. This was the question, this was the stake.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Aurél Dessewffy — Samu Jósika, July 7, 1835. — *Count A. Dessewffy: Összes Művei* (Collected Works), Budapest, 1887, pp. 369–371.

<sup>2</sup> At the time of the 1839/40 Diet, count Aurél Dessewffy was among the conservatives who spoke up for putting an end to political persecution and for the release of political prisoners, and who also intervened in Vienna. "... the Diet, so stormy in the beginning, was dissolved in general jubilation" Dessewffy writes. "It was held that I had a considerable share in all this, particularly in the reconciliation of the parties." (*Önéletrajzi jegyzetek; Autobiographical Notes*). *Count A. Dessewffy: Összes Művei* (Collected Works), p. 410.

See also *L. Szögyény-Marich: Emlékiratai* (Memoirs), vol. I, p. 14.



- <sup>3</sup> This memorandum was presumably a more comprehensive original of the writing, bearing the date January 1, 1839, which was published by József Ferenczy under the title "Elmélkedés a megnyíló országgyűlés felől" (Meditations on the Opening Diet) in the omnibus volume "Gróf Dessewffy Aurél Összes Művei" (Collected Works of Count A. Dessewffy). Ferenczy emphasizes that this paper is "a fragment of a larger work. The original manuscript is no longer to be found among Aurél Dessewffy's writings..." *Count A. Dessewffy: Összes Művei* (Collected Works) p. 443.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 379 and 381.
- <sup>5</sup> Also Miksa Falk writes: "Dessewffy submitted a detailed memorandum to the government in which he presented the situation and his own opinion about the course to be followed in the nearest future." *M. Falk: Széchenyi élete* (The Life of Széchenyi), p. 109. *Mihály Horváth* says the same in *Fünfundzwanzig Jahre ...* vol. I, p. 485 und 488.
- <sup>6</sup> *Count A. Dessewffy: Összes Művei* (Collected Works) p. XXXIV.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* XLIII.
- <sup>8</sup> *A. Dessewffy: Vermischte Aufsätze und Bruchstücke aus Briefen 1835–1842.* Pesth, 1843, XXXIV. Not long before his premature death, Aurél Dessewffy himself declared in a letter: "J'ai entrepris ce Journal, sans y avoir été autorisé par personne, dans cette conviction que ce contrepoids contre les doctrines subversives, était absolument nécessaire." Letter dated January 25, 1842. Published in *A. Dessewffy: Összes Művei* (Collected Works), pp. 396–397. László Szőgyény's remark must be interpreted in the same way: "Not asking for help from others when he found it in himself." (*L. Szőgyény-Marich: op. cit.* vol. I, p. 20). The contemporaries, well familiar with the press conditions of that time, are highly sceptical about this. For starting a newspaper the permission of the government – i.e. Metternich – was required. Despite this it may be assumed that Aurél Dessewffy took the initiative also in this respect, like in the case of his memorandum: he took the first step, which then was increasingly supported by Metternich.
- <sup>9</sup> *A. Dessewffy: Fragmente aus einem Aufsatz über den bevorstehenden ungarischen Landtag. Vermischte Aufsätze vol. I.* pp. 71–86.
- <sup>10</sup> See: Count Antal Szécsen's recollections of Aurél Dessewffy. Published by *L. Szőgyény-Marich: op. cit.* pp. 112–114.
- <sup>11</sup> *Széchenyi István naplói* (The Diaries of István Széchenyi) Ed: Gyula Vízota. Entry of February 22, 1842. vol. V. p. 557. See also *Lajos Kovács: Széchenyi István közéletének három utolsó éve* (The Last Three Years in the Public Life of István Széchenyi. 1846–1848). vol. I, Budapest, 1886, p. 65.
- <sup>12</sup> *A. Dessewffy: Vermischte Aufsätze ...* pp. XXX–XXXI.
- <sup>13</sup> *G. Turba: Eine Denkschrift Metternichs und Jarckes über Ungarn vom Ende 1841 – Historisch-politische Blätter, München, vol. I, pp. 30–47, 170–182.*
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> The extremely high salaries of the county lieutenants and administrators, amounting to annual 5–6 000 guildens which was many times over the usual, became an efficient means of political corruption in the hands of the government later on.
- <sup>16</sup> In this strictly confidential memorandum Metternich was carried away by an uncommon frankness: "Jahrzehntelang war im Zentrum der Regierung die Frage unentschieden, ob Ungarn mit oder ohne seine geschichtlich gegebene Verfassung regiert werden solle. Dies mag am meisten dazu beigetragen haben, den heutigen Stand der Dinge ins Leben zu rufen. Als ein Mittelweg in jener Alternative scheint nämlich das Auskunftsmittel gedient zu haben, die Verfassung selbst in ihrem Cardinalpunkte unentschieden zu lassen."
- <sup>17</sup> Eventually it was this hybrid, non-consistent course of bourgeois development that took place in Hungary after the Compromise, needless to say with the modifications which life, historical development inevitably demanded. It requires no special explanation that this variant of capitalist development – exactly because it salvaged more than one element of feudal oppression for the era of a bourgeois society – was fatally harmful for the country.
- <sup>18</sup> Convocation was due for 1843.
- <sup>19</sup> Also the author of this paper held for a long time that the neo-conservative tendency emerging in Hungary in the early forties was a creation of Metternich's political work-

shop, his intellectual baby. „Die Gründung der gegenrevolutionären Partei der feudalen und absolutistischen Reaktion, ihre fortschrittliche Tarnung, damit sie um so erfolgreicher der Reformbewegung entgegentreten können, die Behauptung, dass diese Partei im wesentlichen dasselbe beabsichtigte, was Kossuth und seine Gesinnungsgenossen, nur vernünftiger und mit anderen Methoden —, all das war eine Idee, würdig der Metternichschen politischen hohen Schule, — Die konservative Partei „war tatsächlich die letzte Zuflucht der Metternichschen Politik in Ungarn, ein politischer Schachzug der feudalen und absolutistischen Reaktion am Vorabend der ungarischen, antifeudalen und nationalen Revolution. (*E. Andics: Der Widerstand der feudalen Kräfte in Ungarn am Vorabend der bürgerlichen Revolution des Jahres 1848.*“ Extrait des Études des Délégués Hongrois au X<sup>e</sup> Congrès International des Sciences Historiques, Rome, 4–11 September 1955, pp. 193–194. Budapest, 1955.) While fully maintaining the findings of the political and class analysis of the neo-conservative line, I feel I must take a negative stand — based on my more recent research — in respect of Metternich's initiating role: the novel approach to the Hungarian question in the forties was taken over by Metternich from Aurél Dessewffy.

<sup>20</sup> As one of them noted: „Mochte er nun für die Aufgabe zu alt, oder die Frage für ihn zu jung, zu neu sein, es wollte ihm nicht gelingen, sich aus dem Kreise der ganz korrekten theoretischen Axiome herauszuwinden und mit einer durchgreifenden Idee auf das praktische Feld der Aktion herauszutreten.“ See the lines quoted from baron Lajos Ambrózy's memoirs in *H. Schlüter: Beiträge zur neueren Geschichte Österreichs*. Vol. IV, Vienna, 1908, p. 250.

<sup>21</sup> *A. Springer: Geschichte Österreichs seit dem Wiener Frieden 1809*. Second part. Leipzig, 1865, p. 103.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Also the contemporary Wessenberg — Metternich's co-worker for many years — called in doubt that the author of the „Aphorisms“ should have been the State Chancellor (quoted in *Briefe Wessenbergs und Isfordink* — Kostnitz, vol. I, p. 102).

<sup>23</sup> *J. Miskolczy: Metternich und die ungarischen Stände*. Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs. vol. XII. 1959, p. 249.

<sup>24</sup> According to Srbik the manner in which Springer treats this question is „recht veraltet“, and Wessenbergs doubts are „altogether unfounded“. Quoted from *H. Srbik: Metternich, der Staatsmann und der Mensch*. München, 1925, vol. II, p. 591, footnotes.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted from *Schlüter*, op. cit. p. 251.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted from *L. von Wirkner: Meine Erlebnisse*. Blätter aus dem Tagebuche meines öffentlichen Wirkens vom Jahre 1825–1852. 2nd ed., Pressburg–Leipzig, 1880.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. pp. 146–162.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. pp. 162–163. The allegation that with Aurél Dessewffy's death in February 1842 the neo-conservative group headed by him should have dissolved into nothing is of a similar nature. „Mit seinem Tode“ writes Wirkner, „zerstäubte auch die kaum gebildete Konservative Partei.“ Ibid. p. 125.

<sup>29</sup> Reference to the Diet of 1832/36.

<sup>30</sup> This is a reference to the slight reduction of the villein services resolved by the Diet of 1832/36. Although these reductions were insignificant as concerned the peasantry, the lords of the mammoth estates reacted sensitively. According to contemporary records „the loss suffered by Prince Esterházy amounts to annual 100 000 gulden, by Prince Batthyány to 16 000 gulden.“ *Gróf Keglevich Jánosné Zichy Adél naplója a reformkorszakról* (Her Diaries from the Reform Era) 1822–1836. Budapest, 1938, p. 114. Entry of September 19, 1834.

<sup>31</sup> See: *Palatine József — Metternich, January 9, 1842*, Ol. N. 22. József nádor titkos iratai (The Secret Papers of Palatine József) roll 47.

<sup>32</sup> His discussions written with the intention to serve as a programme prove also in this instance that, on the one hand, he was incomparably more familiar with the Hungarian conditions than Metternich, and that, on the other hand, he displayed more flexibility and ingeniousness in his political ideas than was the property of the State Chancellor as a rule.

<sup>33</sup> *E. Wertheimer: Metternich und die Staatskonferenz*. Österreichische Rundschau, vol. X, no. 2, p. 125 and 128.



- <sup>34</sup> The profound uncertainty and pessimism is faithfully reflected in the contemporary notes and statements of Kübeck, Wessenberg, the archduke János, the archduchess Zsófia, Kolowrat, Rechberg and others. Nor was Metternich, otherwise little disposed to it, free from pessimism, as is revealed mainly by the diary entries of the princess Melánia.
- <sup>35</sup> All this could not remain a secret even abroad. "Grande fermentation dans toutes les parties de la monarchie même dans les états héréditaires" — says Guizot among others in the mid-forties. François Guizot à Dorothée de Lieven, July 25, 1846. *Lettres de François Guizot et de la Princesse de Lieven*, vol. III. Paris, 1964, pp. 233–235.
- <sup>36</sup> Világ, August 18, 1841. "The owner introduces the new Editor" p. 263.
- <sup>37</sup> Világ, August 18, 1841. Editorial, October 13, 1841, December 29, 1841, etc.
- <sup>38</sup> Világ, December 29, December 1, 1841.
- <sup>39</sup> Világ, October 30, 1841, October 27, 1841, pp. 361–368.
- <sup>40</sup> Világ, August — December issues of 1841. About the Hungarian neo-conservatives, see *E. Andics: 1848–1849.*, Budapest, 1968. *E. Andics: Der Widerstand der feudalen Kräfte in Ungarn am Vorabend der bürgerlichen Revolution des Jahres 1848.* Budapest, 1955.
- <sup>41</sup> "Heute ... fordert das Interesse Ungarns: sich mit der Regierung fest zu einigen." *A. Dessewffy: Vermischte Aufsätze ...* p. 86. Count Aurél Dessewffy: *Összes Művei* (Collected Works) p. 212.
- <sup>42</sup> Világ, August 18, 1841, pp. 263–266.
- <sup>43</sup> Világ, October 23, 1841, October 9, pp. 353–355.
- <sup>44</sup> Világ, October 8, 1841, p. 352.
- <sup>45</sup> Count A. Dessewffy: *Összes művei* (Collected Works) p. 396. *A. Dessewffy: Vermischte Aufsätze ...* vol. I, pp. 136–137. According to the publisher, this letter of January 22, 1842, "ist gleichsam sein Schwanengesang".
- <sup>46</sup> As his biographer writes about him: "... he insisted on the monarchic form of government whose safeguard he saw in a unified and firm central leadership which placed under his control would certainly have taken an absolutistic course." Count A. Dessewffy: *Összes Művei* (Collected Works) p. XLVIII.